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## ABSTRACT

Included in this publication are the following two presentations: (1) Characteristics of Children with Reading Problems and (2) Prevention of Reading Problems. Also included is a section called Viewpoints, which consists of questions and answers from discussion groups. Classified as learning characteristics are variability of performance, memory deficits, discriminatory or perceptual deficits, and need for repetition; the emotional characteristic described is anxiety. Three major factors in the prevention of reading problems are pointed out: (1) The concept of readiness which is not synonymous with maturation is viewed as a result of interaction between maturation and learning and is defined in terms of skills the child is lacking. (2) Thinking must be in terms of the school taking the responsibility when the child fails to learn. (3) The principle that there is no best method of teaching all children to read can result in matching method and child. Some of the discussion questions dealt with grouping, junior high school retarded readers, the language experience approach, and personal aspects of reading. References are included. (DH)

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## TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

Proceedings  
of  
Second Annual

### Fall Forum in Reading

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## FOREWORD

Since the "great debate" concerning the teaching of reading continues to be of major professional interest, the Texas Woman's University is happy to offer again The Fall Forum in Reading as an experience in exploring this interest. In presenting the addresses of Dr. Donald Neville and the summaries of the group discussions, these proceedings make a significant contribution to the literature in this field of study. For decades, observers have noted the almost cyclic emphasis accorded first one approach to the teaching of reading and then another. The periodic pronouncements concerning the efficacy of particular methodological procedures in the teaching of reading has kept the typical classroom teacher in a constant state of uncertainty. The thesis offered by Dr. Donald Neville is both salutary and reassuring. His research confirms or reinforces the philosophy and practices of most master teachers, namely, that there is no one best way to teach all children to read. Children experiencing difficulty in learning to read usually possess a unique syndrome of problems. These children show marked variability in learning; they often respond well to the instruction in one activity and poorly in others. The great need in the teaching of reading is to devise methods and materials which best relate to the learning modalities and experiences of each child.

We are gratified that the Forum has come to belong to both the University and the community. Its unqualified success was due to the enthusiastic and capable efforts of the Forum Committee, the many other faculty members and students, and the consultants from neighboring cities who assisted with the program. The 1967 Forum was planned and directed by The College of Education Faculty Committee on Reading: Dr. Aileen Griffin, Dr. Juanita Prater, Dr. Delores Gardner, Dr. J. D. Tyson and Dr. Joe Redwine. They are to be especially commended for their work.

Ted W. Booker  
Dean

March 8, 1968

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH READING PROBLEMS

Donald Neville  
George Peabody College for Teachers

My objective this morning is to present to you what I consider to be those characteristics of poor readers which have important educational implications. I shall not attempt to discuss in any detail the implementation of instructional programs which consider these characteristics; but will leave this as a possible topic for your small group discussions.

As I reflected on the plans for this lecture, I was faced with the selection of the most effective method of presenting this topic. I wished to present research on the topic, but did not want this paper to become simply a review of the research literature. Therefore, I have attempted to solve the problem by presenting each of the characteristics and discussing an example or two of the types of research projects which identified this particular characteristic of poor readers.

The paper will be divided into two general headings; Learning-Intellectual Characteristics and Emotional-Attitudinal Characteristics. Specific topics included under Learning Characteristics are variability of performance, memory deficits, perceptual and discrimination deficits, and repetition needs. The subheadings under Emotional-Attitudinal Characteristics are incidence of emotional problems and selected specific characteristics.

Before discussing the characteristics in detail, perhaps it would be valuable to define what is meant by "reading problems." A reading problem exists when, for one reason or another, a child's reading level is significantly below the level of his general intellectual functioning. In most of the studies mentioned, reading achievement was at least one year below "potential."

When the term "reading" is used, the total act of reading, including understanding, is implied. It should also be understood that as these characteristics are discussed there is no suggestion that all poor readers exhibit all of these behaviors. Rather, it should be assumed that some of these characteristics are exhibited by all poor readers.

### LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS

#### Variability of Performance

This characteristic refers to the tendency for poor readers to do well in some areas of learning and poorly in others. For example, teachers and parents very often observe that these children exhibit behaviors which indicate that they are capable of high level problem-solving while at the same time they are unable to consistently recognize even very simple words.

The variability aspect of poor readers' behavior has been examined in many research projects, but two representative studies are presented here. First, let me refer you to a study which utilized the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). In this project, 33 pairs of male retarded and non-retarded readers were examined. The two groups were matched on total IQ, grade level, and all had been referred to a reading clinic. When

the intellectual performance of these two groups was compared, it was found that the poor readers did better on the performance tasks which required only a minimal use of language (e.g., assembling puzzles, or placing jumbled sets of pictures into sequence). On the other hand, poor readers achieved lower scores on the verbal subtests (i.e., answering questions by means of verbal responses). In fact, the mean performance IQ of the poor reader group was more than ten points higher than their verbal IQ.

While the poor readers were generally poor on the verbal tasks, there was a marked variability in their performance in this area. As would be expected, they did better on the tasks which did not require the recall of school-type information. While the poor readers' scores on the Information subtest was low (Information subtest requires answers to specific questions: Who discovered America?), their scores on the Similarity subtest were not different from the nonretarded readers (Similarity subtest solicits answers to questions like: How are a piece of glass and a knife alike?).

Another research report which bears on the question of variability of performance used the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability (ITPA) and supplementary measures. Again, it was found that the 45 poor readers in the sample tended to exhibit significant variability in their performance on differing tasks. They showed fewer deficits on those measures which had a recognizable meaning than on those measures which were simple memory or perception tasks. For example, the poor readers were able to garner information from meaningful pictures but less able to look at a series of geometric designs and remember the order in which they appeared.

#### Memory Deficits

The results of research into this aspect of behavior seem to indicate that some poor readers exhibit difficulties in remembering certain types of materials when they are presented either auditorially or visually.

The WISC studies, described previously, illustrate the difficulties with auditory memory. Poor readers exhibited inferior performance for both the Digit Span and the Arithmetic subtests. The Digit Span subtest requires the child to listen to a series of numbers of from 3 to 9 digits in length and then repeat them. The Arithmetic subtest solicits an answer to a verbal problem. It is interesting to note the behavior of the poor readers during the Arithmetic subtest as well as the fact that they achieved low scores. As an example, when the following problem was read, "John had five marbles; his mother gave him three more. How many marbles did he have altogether?", the poor reader tended to have difficulty remembering the fact that John began with five marbles long enough to process it by adding the three marbles given to John by his mother. However, if the numbers were written down, the poor readers seemed more often able to give correct responses.

The study with the ITPA also found difficulties in auditory memory. In this study, the children were given nonsense words by syllables and requested to combine them into a whole word. For example, the examiner would say, "res-to-mat," and the child was asked to respond by saying, "restomat." Again, poor readers exhibited a deficit.

Memory deficits seemed to appear when material is presented visually as well as when it is presented auditorially. It was mentioned previously that poor readers achieved lower scores on tasks requiring them to remember the

sequence of a series of geometric designs than did good readers. Additional data is available from the WISC studies where poor readers show deficits on the Coding subtest. The task of the Coding subtest is to consistently match given numbers with specified designs. Not only do the poor readers score low on this subtest, but as one watches them perform, it is realized that it is necessary for them to refer to the model more frequently than is necessary for good readers.

#### **Discriminatory or Perceptual Deficits**

It is not a simple task to separate the deficits to be described in this section from those described as memory. However, discriminatory and perceptual tasks as conceived of in this paper will involve a step beyond that of simple memory or reproduction. This step will usually involve comparing two stimuli and judging whether they are the same or different.

Auditory discrimination has been measured in various ways but, for our purposes, data gathered from the Wepman Test of Auditory Discrimination will be presented. The Wepman Test involves the child listening to a series of 40 pairs of words and telling whether these words are the same or different. A sample of two test items is: gum - dumb and tall - tall. The data from use of this instrument indicate that children who are classified as reading problems have difficulty with this task. They are more likely to listen to two different words and respond that these words are the same.

Also, if the stimulus is presented visually rather than auditorially, an inferior performance results. Research using the Primary Mental Abilities Test (PMA) has illustrated the visual perceptual and/or discrimination weaknesses among poor readers.

Specifically, these weaknesses are exhibited by low scores on the Spatial Relations and Perceptual Speed subtests. The Spatial Relations subtest of the PMA requires the child to select the correct missing piece of a geometric design from among four distractors. The Perceptual Speed subtest demands that the child match two geometric designs from among four.

#### **Need for Repetition**

This particular characteristic has not been identified through a research effort specifically related to poor readers. However, it has been identified in slow learning and mentally retarded children and it has been observed clinically among poor readers. It is the author's contention that, behaviorally, poor readers are similar to mentally retarded children in their inability to learn to read. Thus, it is a logical extension to utilize this research with poor readers.

In a specific study, four groups of children, two normal and two mentally retarded, were selected. Individuals in each group were taught a paired associates task until they mastered it. Then, one normal and one mentally retarded group were given extra practice (after they had mastered the task). Each group was tested 30 days after their last experience with the material. The normals who received extra practice did not remember more material than the normals who did not receive extra practice, but the mentally retarded who received the extra practice remembered as much as either of far below the other three. Thus, it appears to be the extra practice which

occurred after the task was mastered which made the difference. It is my observation that we are often prone to leave a task before the poor reader has really mastered it. I hope that this will be interpreted to mean that the extra practice suggested will meet the criteria of good teaching; specifically, that the teacher will find different and interesting ways of presenting the material on which the child needs extra practice.

## EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

### Incidence of Problems

The definition of what constitutes an "emotional problem" is difficult. For our purposes, it will be defined as attitudes and behavior which appear to interfere with learning to read. There have been numerous and varied estimates of the incidence of these problems among poor readers. These estimates have ranged from about 15% to 85% of the poor reader population, depending on the definition of emotional problems. However, most experts agree that as a group poor readers show a higher incidence of disturbance than do average readers.

Related to the amount of disturbance is the cause of the disturbance. It is the speaker's opinion that enough time has been wasted on this "chicken or egg" controversy. It is not important to the child whether his emotional difficulties caused the reading problem or vice versa. What is important to the teacher and to the child is that often there are emotional or attitudinal factors present which interfere with learning to read.

Research related to the emotional characteristics of retarded readers has been of two general types. One type has resulted in data related to whether or not poor readers exhibit emotional maladjustment and the degree of this maladjustment. The other, and it seems to me more productive type of research, has examined the relationship between specific types of emotional behavior or aspects of personality and reading performance. It is this second type of research which will be discussed in this paper. Again, it will be necessary to restrict the presentation to selected studies.

### Specific Emotional Factors

Anxiety is one aspect of emotional adjustment which has been related to school achievement. In fact, Professor Seymour Sarason at Yale University has developed an instrument for measuring anxiety in school children called the Test Anxiety Scale (TASC). Since "test" is defined as any situation in which the child feels he is being asked to produce, several authors have pointed out that test anxiety as measured by the TASC is synonymous with school anxiety. Research with this instrument has indicated that low achievers have tended to have high anxiety scores.

Specific research at Peabody has indicated that anxiety relates to reading in a rather complicated but logical way. The subjects for this study were 54 boys enrolled in a six-weeks summer reading program at the Child Study Center. The chronological age range of the subjects was 7-14, with a mean of 10.5. The grade level range was 3-9, with a mean of 5.5. Before instruction began, the subjects were given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Form B; the appropriate level of the Lorge Thorndike Group Intelligence Test, Form A; the Test Anxiety Scale for children; and either the Gates Basic or Advanced Primary Reading Test. The subjects were divided into three groups according to their score on the Anxiety Scale; High Anxiety,



Middle Anxiety, and Low Anxiety. Statistical analyses indicated that the three anxiety levels were not different on IQ, age, or grade. The results of this study indicated that there is no difference in vocabulary gain among the Low Anxiety, Middle Anxiety and High Anxiety groups. However, on comprehension, the Middle Anxiety group made significantly more gain than either the Low Anxiety or High Anxiety group. As a matter of fact, the High Anxiety group actually scored lower in comprehension on the posttest than they did on the pretest.

From the research relating to school achievement, the following conclusions seem justified: (1) high anxiety negatively affects test scores and grades; (2) high anxiety has more negative effect on unstructured tasks and complex tasks; perhaps this is the reason that, in the study described above, high anxiety affected comprehension more than vocabulary; (3) underachievers tend to exhibit higher anxiety than those children who are not underachievers.

In addition, in studies comparing the frustration tolerance of poor readers to that of average and good readers, it was found that poor readers: (1) showed less insight into problems; (2) exhibited less tendency to assume responsibility for the problems; and (3) behaved more defensively and hypersensitively to criticism.

#### Conclusions

It appears to me that the evidence that we have presented today indicates that children who exhibit reading difficulties are different on many important variables from children who read well. This means that the teacher must attempt to design programs which are tailored to fit the needs of these children.

One of the consistent errors which we have made in working with these children is to assume that they need more of the same thing. For example, if they seem unable to attack words phonetically, our approach has been to teach phonetic word attack skills. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to attack the problem at the basic level of auditory discrimination or memory. Similarly, more sight word practice may not be the answer to developing a sight vocabulary when the basic skills in visual perception and memory are lacking.

## PREVENTION OF READING PROBLEMS

Donald Neville  
George Peabody College for Teachers

If one is going to discuss the teacher and the prevention of reading problems, one must assume that the teacher is functioning in an atmosphere in which he has some control over the instructional arrangements. It must be recognized that if a teacher is expected to use a single basal reader program or, indeed, must use basal readers as the exclusive tool for teaching reading, his ability to prevent reading problems becomes limited. The objective of this statement is not to reject basal readers but to reject a reading program which does not allow the teacher to take full advantage of the available tools and methods. However, the teacher must assume the responsibility of being prepared to teach under the system or systems of his choice.

Class size is another factor that the school system must be concerned about. A first grade with 30 or more children in it is likely to exhibit a higher percentage of reading and other problems at the end of the year than a class with under 30. Of course, the number 30 has no magical attributes, and the relationship of class size to achievement appears to depend on both the teacher and the type of children in the class. However, the administration must recognize the need to limit class size when the types of children being served indicate this need.

Specialized services are necessary if we are to prevent reading problems. The teacher needs the assistance of school nurses, psychologists, social workers (or other liaison with the home) if reading problems are to be prevented.

The point of these introductory statements is to be certain that no one, including the teacher, makes the naive assumption that the prevention of reading problems is the sole responsibility of the teacher. However, there is no doubt that adequate classroom instruction is a major deterrent to the development of reading problems. The remainder of this paper will attempt to discuss the classroom teacher's role in prevention.

The concept of readiness seems to be the major factor in the prevention of reading problems. If the teacher believes that readiness is synonymous with maturation, then an excess of reading difficulties is bound to occur. At the Peabody Child Study Center, we see many children each year who were classified by the schools as reading failures because they were "immature." The implication of this statement seems to be that if given another year or more of living, this child will catch up to his peers or at least close the achievement gap. The result of this concept of readiness for learning is that the child is either retained in the same grade for another year or he is socially promoted. In either case, little special instructional help is provided for him. The research indicates that the child does not usually catch up. In fact, the reverse is true; he usually falls further and further behind.

In a recent research study at the Child Study Center, 30 pairs of first-second-grade children were matched on (a) race, (b) sex, (c) socio-economic level, (d) type of classroom assignment, (e) age, (f) mental ability, and (g) reading achievement. Each pair consisted of a once-retained first grader and a never-retained second grader. The children were white, low socio-economic, slow learners from urban areas. Metropolitan Achievement Tests

were administered at the end of their first year in school, the end of their second year in school, and the end of their third year in school. Results of this study indicated that while at the end of their first year both groups were about one-half year behind their chronological grade placement, by the end of the third year the non-promoted group was one and one-half years behind and the promoted group one and one-tenth years behind. This would lead to the conclusion that while the promoted group achieved somewhat better than the non-promoted group, both were falling further and further behind their peer group in achievement.

The child from the culturally-economically deprived home often comes to school with skills and attitudes which make him unprepared to learn. As a group, these children remain unprepared to learn and they move from one grade to another and continue to fall further and further behind. This also happens to youngsters who exhibit reading difficulties but who come from more favored socio-economic background.

An alternative to the above concept of readiness is to view it as a result of interaction between maturation and learning and to be prepared to define the skills of readiness in which the child is lacking. One plan for specifying the behaviors which are lacking was presented this morning. If the child is not ready to learn to recognize words in first grade, it may be because he has difficulties recognizing visual similarities or differences; or because he is unable to accurately perceive sounds; or for some other reasons. The point is that the instructional program must be geared to the deficit if this skill deficit is a necessary prerequisite to learning to read.

Another major factor in the prevention of reading problems is the concept of the purpose of schools. Do they exist for the benefit of the teacher and the school staff, or for the benefit of the children? This may appear to some in the audience to be a question to which the answer is self-evident. However, the speaker's conclusion is that while the answer to the question is obvious, observations of behavior of the school staff often suggest that the child is not the central concern in the instructional program. To expand on this idea, let me describe two recent observations of classroom procedure:

(a) During a recent visit, I observed a class of 15-16 year old boys who were reading on a third grade level. The instructional program and material was very much like that in a normal third grade. The children were working in third grade basal readers and third grade workbook type materials. In talking with the teachers later, a common statement was, "I don't know what's the matter with these children; they're not interested in learning." I am sure this was true; at least, they were not interested in learning in an environment which defined their needs as those of third graders. Most of the boys were from economically deprived homes, and it is my opinion that their special needs were never given much attention in the classroom. I would have been more pleased if the teacher had recognized that a part of the boys' disinterest might have resulted from the inadequacy of the educational program and materials, and not only because of something negative within the boys.

(b) Another example occurred in a recent visit to a fifth grade class. One of the reading groups was doing an assignment on finding the main idea of some two and three-page stories. The teacher was at the desk checking the children's responses as they completed the assignment. About half of the children who were working on the assignment did very well, but

about half were selecting either erroneous responses or ones which were details within the selection but not the main idea. The teacher marked each paper, and if the responses were incorrect, sent the child back to redo the selection. After this class the teacher said, "That was my slow group; they just can't do abstract thinking." Again, the responsibility for failure was placed on the child. I wondered if the teacher might not have contemplated whether or not these children need experience in finding main ideas in shorter selections—perhaps sentences or short paragraphs—before they were faced with finding the main idea in longer stories.

The objective of these observations, however, is to point up the fact that it is easy to go with our same old techniques and methods and blame our lack of success on the child. It is much more stimulating to view each non-learner as having potential which we can assist him in realizing. Of course, this opens us up to the possibility of trying our best and failing, but the attempt to meet the child's needs also adds to the efficacy of the instructional program.

The attitude of placing the blame on the child has been especially important in dealing with children who are potential reading problems. You will recall that one of the characteristics of these children is the tendency to show strengths in one area and weaknesses in another. This has confused teachers and parents. It is difficult to understand why a child can tell you how coal and paper are alike but he can't remember a simple printed word from one day to the next. A common conclusion has been that the child is trying on the one task but not trying on the other. It seems more likely that, at least initially, he tries on both, but needs specifically planned help to be successful on certain of these tasks.

Another factor which contributes to the development of reading problems appears to be our search for "a best method" to teach reading. Our belief that we will find a method is reflected by the often asked question, "Do you believe in phonics?"—or i/t/a?—or whatever the method happens to be. The answer is, "Of course I believe in them, but not necessarily for all children."

We recently completed a two-year project aimed at studying the efficacy of three reading programs for children in inner-city schools. Most of the children came from economically deprived homes and about 75% were Negro. The three methods used were: i/t/a, Words in Color, and a basal reading program (Houghton-Mifflin) supplemented by a phonics program (Hay-Wingo). The interim results after one year indicated that there were no significant differences in the achievement of children in these three methods. We intend to follow these children for several more years to see whether or not significant differences will appear. Studies are now under way to determine the characteristics of the children who failed under each method and to ascertain whether the characteristics of the children who failed under one method are different from those who failed under another method. However, it was clear that a single method was not generally superior.

Another study which relates to this problem is one reported by Mills using his Learning Methods Test. He taught children words by three carefully prescribed different methods; visual, kinesthetic, and auditory (phonetic). The results indicated that none of the three methods was superior for all children; 60% of the children learned equally well regardless of method. For about 40% of the children, it appeared that certain methods were in-

effective, but the specific method which was ineffective depended on the individual child. A youngster might learn equally well visually and kinesthetically but show a deficit when taught phonically.

Therefore, rather than be concerned about selecting a method which is "best" we must be more concerned about matching child and method.

As the characteristics of poor readers were described previously, it appears that two equally logical conclusions are possible: (1) That since poor readers showed weakness in skills pertaining to visual and auditory memory and to those pertaining to visual and auditory perception, it would be logical to develop programs to train children in these skills. Of course, this is just what has been done with the recent development of teaching materials. (2) Another alternative possibility is that the major difference between good and poor readers is the fact that poor readers must be taught new skills by a method which presents this new skill in a meaningful setting. Thus, while he has difficulty with auditory integration of nonsense words, he can often listen to a story and comprehend it adequately.

A good deal more research is needed before any valid conclusions can be reached. At this stage of our knowledge, perhaps we can use both of these conclusions as we teach potentially poor readers.

However, it does seem as though it would be profitable for us to keep in mind three principles. (1) If we intend to prevent reading problems, we must specify the weaknesses that children show in instructionally applicable terms. It does little good to describe a youngster as immature. However, if we could describe him as unable to hear differences in sounds, the description has an educationally meaningful implication. (2) That we must begin to think in terms of children not learning because of our inability to devise methods and materials which are applicable rather than always blaming the problem on something within the child. (3) That there is no "best" method of teaching reading for all children. However, we must begin to move toward matching the needs of the child with the rationale of a particular reading program.

## VIEWPOINTS

from the Discussion Groups

The following questions and answers, compiled from recorders' reports, reflect the major interests and concerns which evolved in the Discussion Groups. Answers show there were differing viewpoints on some questions. The bibliography is composed of resources referred to in discussions.

### Grouping

Question: Should poor readers be grouped in one or more class sections?

Answers: (1) Homogeneous grouping of readers places retarded readers at a disadvantage more than it does capable readers. Retarded readers are discouraged by being identified as the "slow group." They need the classroom teacher to work with them in small groups or individually according to the skill needs they have. Other pupils in the classroom will also be working in small groups or individually on their problems. Although the retarded readers will be working on easier than grade level material, they need to be exposed to the talk, experiences, and learning excitement of the more capable children in many all-class situations. Much of their concept learning comes through listening to and watching other children.

(2) If the teacher in the heterogeneous classroom has groups for different skills and interest needs in reading, arithmetic, science, and social studies, grouping within the classroom becomes a natural pattern of work. The group a pupil works in is acceptable to him because he understands why he is working in a particular group.

(3) In one school which has team teaching, class sub grouping is done in reading and arithmetic. The weakest children in each subject area are in one group, the average in another, and the strongest in another. The same children are not always in the same groups in arithmetic and reading.

(4) One school is doing experimental work at this time in grouping first graders. The children are given pre-school readiness tests.<sup>1</sup> Those children who appear to be very weak for the regular first grade program are placed in special first grade classrooms where they do intensive work in motor skills as suggested by Kephart,<sup>2</sup> in perceptual training as suggested by Frostig,<sup>3</sup> the Winterhaven Templates,<sup>4</sup> and other practice sources, and in listening and speaking. Enriched environmental activities are offered to these children so that they will have experiences to talk about.

(5) Modeled on the St. Louis plan, one school has a "class of twenty" third grade children who have made slow progress in reading and arithmetic during the first two years of school. These children have extra support in basic skills. The regular third grade social studies and science concepts are developed; much dramatization, role playing, and many concrete experiences are offered in social studies and science classes to replace verbal research. These children move into the regular fourth grade program the following year.

(6) One first grade teacher is using Katrina de Hirsch's **Predictive Index**<sup>5</sup> as one means of studying her first grade children. She plans readiness work in her classroom according to the perceptual needs, auditory needs, language needs, and visual needs that she sees from her class diagnostic study.

### **JUNIOR HIGH RETARDED READER**

**Question:** How do you work with junior high retarded readers?

**Answers:** (1) The use of one or a combination of such diagnostic instruments as Gates' Diagnostic Reading Tests<sup>6</sup> or Spache's Diagnostic Reading Scales will help the teacher learn the reader's strengths and weaknesses. A junior high student will usually be able to follow the teacher understandingly as she discusses his test responses with him. This kind of test conference helps the teacher and pupil plan to work together. Junior high students will often need skills work similar to that of the elementary children. Many of the same resources can be used for phonic and structural word study.

Low-vocabulary high-interest books are available which will appeal to the junior high reader. The mystery, animal, hot rod, and deep sea books published by Harr Wagner Publishing Company, the Signal Books from Harcourt Brace, and the Piper Books from Houghton Mifflin are a few examples.

(2) One school has a reading class for helping junior high retarded readers. Another school combines English and reading so that the student takes no other language arts class. The teacher works on listening, speaking, and writing as well as reading to offer support on all of the communication skills. In another school the retarded readers have English and social studies in a block of time with one teacher. Special emphasis is on reading development in both English and social studies. Mathematics and science teachers sometimes forget that a major need of the junior high reader, and especially the retarded reader, is help in technical vocabulary in mathematics and science. The reading teacher can find out the help needed and use words from these areas in her vocabulary study.

(3) One junior high teacher has found the language experience story in which the pupil writes a story about a picture or some interest in sports, science, or social studies, a useful way of establishing an early successful reading situation. Sometimes this story can offer an outlet for hostility. An experience story the student wishes to be confidential is so treated. To further self-expression, this teacher keeps a complaint box and the students can ventilate their hostilities through writing their complaints.

### **LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH**

**Questions:** What is the language experience approach?

Can poor readers be helped through the language experience method of teaching reading?



**Answers:** Children learn to read through use of their own experiences, first dictated to the teacher who writes them on paper or the chalkboard for individual or small group or class reading.

Later the child writes and reads his own experiences. This approach can be especially helpful to the retarded reader since the stories he dictates or writes have information in which he is interested. Interest is the basic motivating factor in a child's reading.

The language experience approach is not a sight and word memory method. The child works in basic phonics and structural skills through analysis of his own words. He can see the skill he is learning put to use in material that makes sense to him.

The language experience approach is an individualized method of teaching reading. From developing word attack skills and sentence expression through personal stories, the retarded reader can be guided into reading books which meet his interest and skill strengths.

**Question:** Suppose the child is writing a story and wants to use a word he can't spell. What do you do?

**Answer:** The teacher may write the word or words he wants on paper or on the chalkboard, emphasizing by her voice its structural parts as she writes it. As the pupil looks at, says, and copies the word, he is getting kinesthetic as well as visual and auditory reinforcement for both reading and spelling. Written vocabulary (spelling) can be increased through the language-experience approach.

## PARENTS AND READING

**Question:** How can we get parents to help us with a retarded reader?

**Answer:** Many parents are interested and concerned if their children are not reading well enough to satisfy either them or their teachers. If a teacher will have a conference with parents as soon as she has had opportunity to get acquainted with her children and will explain to them what she sees are some of the child's needs and how she is working with these needs, parents will likely feel more secure about the child's having opportunity for help. This conference is the time to stress with parents the importance of encouraging the child in whatever progress he is making. If progress is slow, he is needing even more approval for what he does make. When the child begins to have some successful experiences, he can take evidence of his success—a paper or a book that he can read with ease—home to show his parents so they can commend him.

(2) One thing we do not do is send home work for the parent to teach the child. We send home only material that a child can handle so successfully that if his parents are interested, both the child and the parents will enjoy sharing it. If there is any inadequacy on the part of the child, it becomes intensified as he sees himself appear in an unfavorable light before his parents.



(3) If parents and children can have fun together with books, as well as with shopping, sight-seeing, watching TV, or just talking, parents are making their major contribution to helping a child be a happy reader. If parents are not interested, and with a teacher's best efforts, still indicate no interest, we work with the child without them. We can add to a child's discomfort if we push too hard on parent relationships when there is no parent interest.

### PERSONAL ASPECTS OF READING

**Question:** How important is a child's feeling about himself and reading to his being a capable reader?

**Answers:** (1) Very important. A child must have a positive self-concept; that is, he has to see himself as a reasonably successful reader to be a reader. If he is being stretched beyond what he can understand or do, thus spending most of his time lost in failure, his frustrations affect his intellectual functioning so that learning is hindered. We teach diagnostically so that we can begin working with a child at his success level and advance with him according to the progress he can make.

If a teacher respects each child as an individual and lets him see she believes in his learning power, however weak or strong that may be, he will see himself as an approved individual who can learn. Learning ability differs among children, but every child can learn to read within his intellectual power if he is taught according to his needs and if he believes in himself as a reader. This contribution to a child's developing positive self-image is a responsibility of the teacher.

(2) Another personal factor is motivation. A child must WANT to read before he will read with any real degree of comprehension or enthusiasm. One teacher cited an example of a retarded reader, a girl, who liked to cook. She could read recipes and nothing else. Another told of a boy who could not read very simple readers, even preprimers. His teacher found him reading about horned toads in the encyclopedia because he had a horned toad and wanted to know what to feed him. Interest is the major ingredient in motivation as the last two illustrations show. Interest materials come from many sources: experience stories, newspapers, magazines, library books, supplementary readers, basal readers. The content of basal readers, sometimes criticized, includes stories of interest to children as well as developmental skills practice. However, if all children in the same classroom are required to read each basal reader so that the same story is read over and over to the point that it is exhausted in interest for the poor reader, an important motivating factor can be lost.

(3) Interest centers, as science and hobby, reading skills tables with games, and a social studies table or corner can be set up in the classroom. On each table there are materials of varying

levels of difficulty. One teacher writes a leading question of interest on a small oak tag card and clips it to each selected book so that the resisting reader might get "caught" to find the answer. These books are changed at intervals according to special interests or to some of the ideas being discussed in class or some that are going to be discussed.

(4) Several teachers reported that interests are extended through either a classroom library which has books with a wide range of interests and difficulty or a central library to which children have access. Several schools are having yearly Book Fairs, in cooperation with either a local bookstore or a distributor like Books on Exhibit to help both pupils and parents get excited about books. Sometimes the Book Fair features hard-bound books, sometimes paperbacks.

(5) To help a child see himself becoming a better oral reader, one teacher uses the tape recorder. The child reads into the tape recorder. Only he is involved since other members of the class are engaged in activities of their own. After the child has read, he plays back the section of the tape which records his reading. When he decides he has done the best he can, he calls the teacher to listen and they discuss the strengths and weaknesses of his reading. Each child in the class is allowed a certain amount of time per week to develop his oral reading fluency.

(6) To motivate practice, a teacher has her pupils work a certain number of practice exercises on x-ray sheets to be checked on the overhead projector. Since the children use china markers, the sheets can be wiped clean at the conclusion of the exercise. The pupil and his buddy check his exercise on the overhead projector before the teacher checks it. They then switch roles so that the other team member checks his buddy's exercise with him. The social interaction of this kind of practice adds interest, and two practice sessions rather than one occur.

## RECALL

**Question:** How do we help a child develop recall, or strengthen his memory?

**Answers:** Understanding and interest are necessary before recall and retention develop.

*Teachers offered the following practices they had found helpful:*

(1) Place objects in a box or on the table. Let the children look at them. The teacher covers them; then the children see how many objects they can name.

(2) Ask children to close their eyes after they have looked around the room. Then ask them to name everything in the room smaller than a desk, or everything larger than a desk. This kind of game helps the child to be aware of size relationships as he is practicing visual recall.

(3) Ask children to retell stories which the teacher reads to them or tells them. Both vocabulary and recall are developed.

Variations would be to have the children tell stories they have heard or read to a small group, or into a tape recorder. The story being recalled and told may be in round-robin fashion with one child starting, others picking it up as the story progresses.

(4) Let children read directions from printed strips which involve two or more physical movements. Then ask them to follow the directions.

As a child gets interested in trying to recall something for use, he will develop within his capacity to remember. What he wants to remember, he will remember better.

## READING DISABILITY

**Question:** How can you tell the difference between a "late bloomer" and a child who has reading disability?

**Answer** The late bloomer will "catch on" more quickly to what is being taught through regular classroom procedures developed by an encouraging, approving teacher than will the child who has characteristics of reading disability.

**Question:** What are important practices to observe in working with a disabled reader?

**Answers:** The following practices have proved helpful in working with disabled readers:

Find the child's best modality — best way of learning, whether sight, sound, touch— and capitalize on it. Attention span and motivation are highest in that activity which the child does best. Improve the weak by coordinating the strong with it; that is, use the successful area for personal satisfaction while beginning to work on the weak.

Work should initially focus on the simplest sight-sound association in reading, from single letters to blending letters into words. Calling attention to details of a letter or details within a word is important. Writing or tracing the word will help to call attention to details. Association between the symbol and the sound should be overlearned until the associational response is automatic. The child needs to be correct in nearly all of his responses. This will mean modifying tasks at times, not moving too fast. One of our problems as teachers is that we feel a terrific urge to get the right responses and get them quickly. A few of many resources which have proved helpful in beginning reading experiences with the child who has reading disability are those by Hegge-Kirk,<sup>9</sup> Frostig,<sup>3</sup> Fernald,<sup>10</sup> McLeod,<sup>11</sup> Sullivan,<sup>12</sup> and Slingerland.<sup>13</sup>

**Question:** Are these practices applicable to the older disabled reader as well as to the younger?

**Answers:** Yes. However, the sooner we give a child training in motor skills, in speech, and in perception — whatever his needs — the better. The older child, discouraged about himself, badly needs self-satis-

fyng experiences in reading. The teacher begins work with him at an easy enough level that he can have some success from the beginning. He will need basic or primary training in auditory and visual discrimination. When he has learned to associate symbols with sounds automatically and well, he will likely enjoy moving into vocabulary expansion. We try to give him every opportunity to get pleasure from reading, either his own experience stories or books and magazines.

### SPELLING AND WRITTEN EXPRESSION

**Question:** A poor reader is often a poor speller and poor in writing his ideas. How do you work with him in spelling and composition?

**Answers:** (1) One solution is to use his reading vocabulary, or only selected parts of it, as spelling study. Writing the words can offer kinesthetic reinforcement of vocabulary. Spelling and reading may be taught in the same reading group or in sequential group sessions, or may be taught individually.

If there is a typewriter available either in the classroom or at home, retarded readers can practice their reading-spelling words on the typewriter for practice variation.

(2) When the poor speller writes, he too is encouraged to express ideas as freely as possible. One teacher uses the tape recorder for one weekly conference with each child in her class to point out errors in the child's writing and to commend him for strong points in the paper. Through an earphone the child listens to the teacher's comments and studies the mistakes he will correct. No one hears the discussion but the child. One of the teacher's points of emphasis is that we learn by trying. When we try new things, we will likely make some mistakes. We then learn from these mistakes we make. It is important not to defeat the child's attempt at creative expression by a deluge of red marks on his paper, whether his errors are in spelling or in sentence structure.

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